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SIPDIS
TELEGRAM

June 16, 2003

To: No Action Addressee
Action: Unknown
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 2895 - PRIORITY)
TAGS: PREL, PGOV
Captions: None
Subject: AMBASSADOR PRESSES UAEG ON ZAYID CENTER
Ref: None

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABU DHABI 02895

SIPDIS
CXABU:
ACTION: POL
INFO: AMB P/M ECON DCM RSO

DISSEMINATION: POL
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AMB:MMWAHBA
DRAFTED: POL:STWILLIAMS
CLEARED: A/DCM:TEWILLIAMS

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PP RUEHC RUEHEE RUEKJCS RHEHNSC RUEAIIA RHEFDIA
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DE RUEHAD #2895/01 1671335
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P 161335Z JUN 03
FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0464
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCAACC/USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//POLAD/CCJ2/CCJ5// PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC//OSD/NESA//
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABU DHABI 002895

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP AND NEA/PPD

NSC FOR PETER THEROUX

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/16/13
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PRESSES UAEG ON ZAYID
CENTER

REF: A) Abu Dhabi 2236 (081254Z MAY 03)
B) 02 Abu Dhabi 4712

[1](#)1. (U) Classified by Ambassador Marcelle M. Wahba
for reasons 1.5 (B) and (D).

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY: The Ambassador has repeatedly
engaged the senior UAEG leadership on the need to
make substantive changes at the controversial Abu

Dhabi-based, Arab League-affiliated and UAEG-funded Zayid Center for Coordination and Follow-Up. The Ambassador's most recent engagement was on June 11, when she separately raised the issue with MFA Minstate Hamdan bin Zayid, de facto Defense Minister Muhammad bin Zayid (MbZ) and Ahmed Juma'a Al-Zaabi, the Chief of Staff to Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Khalifa bin Zayid. She had previously raised it in May and on several occasions over the last year or so (Ref A). The Emiratis have assured her they will take action against the Center, including a turnover in administration and a change in the Center's name (presumably to remove any direct connection to Shaykh Zayid). In the short term, steps have been taken to clean up the website, including the removal of most of the anti-semitic language and the placement of a disclaimer noting that the views expressed by Center speakers do not reflect the views of the Center, the Arab League or the UAEG.

13. (C) The Ambassador's senior interlocutors have cautioned that the long-term changes may well take time because of internal Al-Nahyan family dynamics. The Center's patron, erstwhile Deputy Prime Minister Sultan bin Zayid, is Shaykh Zayid's second eldest son. Any move against Sultan by his younger half-brothers MbZ and Hamdan would be viewed as an outright power play. Thus the difficult task of managing Sultan and cleaning up the offensive Zayid Center has fallen on the shoulders of Zayid's eldest son (and Sultan's older half-brother), Crown Prince Khalifa. We believe that Khalifa will do the right thing. The Ambassador will continue to follow-up vigorously with Khalifa to ensure that prompt and effective action is taken, as has been promised. END SUMMARY.

A ZAYID CENTER PRIMER

14. (C) The Ambassador continues to engage the senior Emirati leadership on the need to make substantive changes at the Abu Dhabi-based Zayid Center for Coordination and Follow-Up, a UAEG-funded "think-tank" affiliated with the Arab League. As reported Ref A, the Ambassador first raised concerns about the Center's activities with MFA Minstate Shaykh Hamdan bin Zayid Al-Nahyan in 2002, following the Center's arrangement of an offensive series of lectures and the release of publications containing noxious material about Judaism. Hamdan agreed that the Center had crossed the line and noted that it did not reflect the views of the UAEG. However, he explained the difficulty in affecting change given the fact that Center's sponsor was Zayid's second eldest son and Hamdan's older half-brother, erstwhile UAE Deputy Prime Minister Shaykh Sultan bin Zayid Al-Nahyan.

15. (C) In May of 2003, the Embassy's Public Affairs Office was contacted by Harvard University's Divinity School seeking information about connections between the UAEG and the Center. Several students at the Divinity School, noting the Center's intolerance, had protested Harvard's decision to accept a generous gift from UAE President Zayid to establish a chair for Islamic Religious Studies. The Ambassador drew this issue to the attention of Shaykh Hamdan, highlighting the active damage the Center was doing to Shaykh Zayid's reputation. She pressed the UAEG to take action before Harvard felt compelled to reject Shaykh Zayid's offer of a chair. Hamdan promised to take the matter to Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Shaykh Khalifa bin Zayid Al-Nahyan and asked the Ambassador to put her request in writing.

16. (C) The Ambassador followed-up with a three-page

letter outlining the USG's concerns with the Zayid Center, including material contained on its website and the Center's highly questionable choice of speakers. She noted that while the UAEG may maintain that the Center does not speak for Shaykh Zayid or the government, "that distinction is neither understood nor appreciated...many in the U.S. take the view that if a government wholly or partially funds an organization, that government is responsible for the organization's behavior."

PLUS CA CHANGE... PLUS CA RESTE LA MEME

17. (C) On May 6, Hamdan reported to the Ambassador that Shaykh Khalifa agreed on the need to make changes at the Zayid Center. He said one option was to move it from under Sultan's sponsorship and place it under the supervision of the President's Office. We also learned from a ZCCF employee that orders had been issued to remove anti-semitic references from the website. Embassy officers began monitoring the Center's website on a regular basis. We noted that much of the more offensive material (though not all) was in fact removed and that a caveat has been placed on summaries of lectures placed on the website, explaining that "the views expressed...are solely those of the speaker and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Centre (sic), the position of the League of Arab States, or the official policies of the government of the United Arab Emirates." However, the website maintained one reference to a "Zionist media conspiracy."

18. (C) The Embassy continued through the month of May to prod the UAEG to make changes at the Center. The Ambassador raised the issue with Armed Forces Chief of Staff Muhammad bin Zayid Al-Nahyan (MbZ) on the margins of his May 19-22 visit to the United States. The DCM also raised it with Shaykh Mansour bin Zayid, the Director of Shaykh Zayid's office. Both agreed on the need for action.

ONCE MORE INTO THE BREACH

19. (C) Following her return from consultations in Washington, the Ambassador used the opportunity of a 5/31 meeting with Hamdan to ask what actions had been taken at the Center. Hamdan, who had also just returned to the UAE from a trip to Morocco, promised to get back to the Ambassador. In a 6/11 meeting with Hamdan, the Ambassador raised the Center again, noting the continuing negative attention it was garnering in Washington and drawing Hamdan's attention to the offensive material still on the website. She also discussed it with MbZ in a meeting later the same day. Both Hamdan and MbZ indicated that the decision lay with Crown Prince Khalifa.

110. (C) Late in the evening on 6/11, the Ambassador telephoned Khalifa's Chief of Staff, Ahmed Juma'a Al-Zaabi in Paris where Khalifa was on an official state visit. Al-Zaabi, who was fully briefed on the issue, said that the Crown Prince was very much concerned and understood the damage inflicted on the UAE's reputation by the Zayid Center. Al-Zaabi said the Crown Prince would take action when he returns to the UAE (at the end of June). In response to the Ambassador's query as to what specific actions would be taken, Al-Zaabi said the administration would be changed and the Center's name would be altered (presumably to remove any reference to Shaykh Zayid). He also noted that Khalifa planned to discuss the issue personally with his younger half-brother and Deputy Prime

Minister Sultan.

NOW FOR THE REST OF THE STORY...

¶11. (S) At the heart of the UAEG's apparent reluctance to take immediate steps against the Zayid Center is filial tension in the Al-Nahyan ruling family. The Center's sponsor -- as noted above -- is Deputy Prime Minister Sultan bin Zayid, Shaykh Zayid's second eldest son. Sultan is no stranger to personal controversy, linked to his on-again, off-again drug and alcohol addictions (see Ref B). Sultan's direct competition in the succession line-up is Zayid's third eldest son and for many years our primary interlocutor, Chief of Staff Muhammad bin Zayid (MbZ). It is widely assumed that with Zayid's passing and Khalifa's assumption of the Abu Dhabi ruler and UAE President titles, MbZ will move into the Abu Dhabi Crown Prince slot and Sultan will be given the largely ceremonial role of Deputy Ruler. MbZ and his full brothers effectively manage the critical governmental portfolios -- i.e. defense, foreign affairs, intelligence and information. Despite his current job title and not insignificant ties to some Abu Dhabi tribes, Sultan's actual value-added in governance terms is minimal; he sometimes oversees the weekly cabinet meeting and from time to time greets and sees off visitors.

¶12. (C) Nevertheless, for the sake of the family's honor and dignity, as well as the fact that a public brouhaha involving Sultan would upset the elderly Zayid, Sultan's half-brothers will not move against him. Furthermore, as MbZ noted to the Ambassador, any move regarding the Zayid Center orchestrated by MbZ or his full brothers -- including Hamdan -- would likely be seen in domestic political terms as an unprincipled power-play to move Sultan out of the line of succession, something that would not redound to the longer term benefit of MbZ or his brothers.

¶13. (S) Thus the difficult task of managing Sultan, and cleaning up the offensive Zayid Center, has fallen squarely on the shoulders of his elder half-brother, Crown Prince Khalifa. We believe that Khalifa will do the right thing, despite the embarrassment entailed in a face-to-face confrontation with Sultan. The Ambassador will continue to follow-up vigorously with Khalifa to ensure that he begins to take to take effective action to restructure the Zayid Center.

WAHBA